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SUBJECT: CENTRAL PROVINCE: SIGNS OF POLITICAL FRAGMENTATION
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[1](#)B. NAIROBI 716
[1](#)C. NAIROBI 411

Classified By: Ambassador Michael E. Ranneberger for reasons 1.4 (B and D)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) During a recent visit to the Kikuyu homeland of Central Province by the Ambassador and Pol FSN, residents expressed growing frustration with their Members of Parliament (MPs) and the lack of financial and development benefits from the government despite their steadfast support of President Mwai Kibaki. Residents also expressed a lack of confidence in the police to protect them from an increasingly aggressive Mungiki criminal organization, which contributed to a recent outburst of vigilante violence in Central Province (Reftel A). These grievances have fueled what appears to be a potential split among the previously united Kikuyu political class as ex-Minister of Justice Martha Karua and Assistant Minister for Planning Peter Kenneth, backed by a group of youthful MPs from the GEMA bloc (representing the Kikuyu, Embu, and Meru communities) are challenging Uhuru Kenyatta's status as the region's presumed successor to Kibaki. If Karua or Kenneth can attract significant support, the political dynamics of Central Province and the GEMA bloc would be seriously altered, and presidential hopefuls would need to make new alliances to firm up support for the 2012 election. End Summary.

FRUSTRATION WITH PRESIDENT AND POLITICIANS

[1](#)2. (U) The Ambassador heard many local residents express frustration with the Kikuyu political leadership during his visit to Central Province in late March. A commonly heard opinion was that the Kikuyu had endured 24 years of rule by former President Moi, who had used the government to benefit his Kalenjin people. Many felt that Kibaki had failed to use his position to benefit the Kikuyu and Central Province sufficiently. This sentiment was expressed even in Kibaki's own Othaya constituency, where residents often grumbled that Kibaki was ignoring them to tend to the nation. (Comment: To put these complaints in perspective, Central Province has benefitted from extensive road building throughout Kenya's history. It has the best infrastructure in Kenya. These statements reflect the pervasive view of government office as a resource for promoting the interests of one's own community, often at the expense of others. End Comment.) When asked if they would consider voting for a Kibaki family member for elective office, one man captured the public mood, stating, "We don't want people who are never in touch with us on the ground, who only come here in helicopters." The

failure of the political establishment to tackle corruption and the refusal of MPs to agree to pay taxes on their salaries and allowances has also eroded public confidence. Local journalists estimated that about 80 percent would fail to be re-elected when asked how MPs would fare if elections took place in the next 12 months.

DIVISIONS EMERGING

13. (U) Uhuru Kenyatta's appointment in February as Minister of Finance was seen by many observers (including us) as a signal that Kibaki preferred Kenyatta as the presidential candidate of the Central Province/GEMA (Kikuyu, Embu and Meru) political grouping in the 2012 elections. However, the dissatisfaction expressed during the Ambassador's visit to Central Province provides fertile ground to challenge Kenyatta and the established order. Former Minister of Justice Martha Karua has taken up the challenge. She has a contentious relationship with Kenyatta, and her recent resignation from government (Reftel B) frees her to increase the stridency of her attacks on the government and on Kenyatta. Her strategy is to contrast herself with Kenyatta in a way that resonates with average voters, portraying herself as a reformist and self-made politician fighting for the common folk, while Kenyatta is a defender and beneficiary of the old order. Karua, who made her name as a pro-democracy activist in the 1990s, will need the support of civil society to succeed. However, she will have to reach out and mend fences, as significant segments of civil society are skeptical of her reformist credentials. Karua stridently

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defended the validity of Kibaki's re-election and defended the status quo during her tenure as Minister of Justice.

14. (C) Still, Karua has made some headway. Her recent criticism of Kibaki's leadership (made while she was still Minister of Justice) has been received positively in some quarters of Central Province and is likely to continue from the back bench of Parliament. A recent public opinion poll showed Karua to be the second most popular politician in Kenya behind Prime Minister Odinga. We think the chances are small that Karua will eclipse Kenyatta due to her lack of a financial base and a strong cultural bias against women leaders. However, she has the potential to play the spoiler. Karua made a point of reaching out to Prime Minister Raila Odinga when she was a sitting minister. Short of being the GEMA candidate in 2012, Karua may ally with Odinga to ruin Kenyatta's chances of victory as well as position herself for a senior position in an Odinga government. Lewis Nguyuai, a reform-minded Central Province MP, estimated that if Karua could deliver ten percent of the Kikuyu vote, it would be enough to secure an Odinga victory in 2012.

15. (C) A second potential front of opposition to Kenyatta is also developing, led by the youthful and reformist Assistant Minister of Planning (and MP for Gatanga) Peter Kenneth. A group of approximately 20 MPs from the GEMA communities have coalesced around Kenneth. He is widely accepted as a non-nationalist voice of reason and has good relations with other ethnic communities. Thus, Kenneth might be inclined to lead this bloc to a less GEMA-focused approach to alliances. However, money dominates Kenyan politics and Kenyatta, who is far better off financially than either Karua or Kenneth, will not hesitate to use his wealth to buy off his rivals' supporters, thereby diminishing their prospect to derail his political ambitions.

KIKUYU - KALENJIN ALLIANCE UNLIKELY

16. (U) If Mt. Kenya region voters split their presidential vote, the candidate of the GEMA establishment would need to reach out to other ethnic groups to expand his/her power base. Indeed, there has been much speculation about an

alliance between Kenyatta and Agriculture Minister William Ruto, the leader of the Kalenjin political bloc. Their recent cooperation in Parliament to defeat two measures (a constitutional amendment to establish a Special Tribunal to try those suspected of organizing and financing post-election and a censure motion raised against William Ruto for his alleged role in a maize scandal (Reftel C)) has further fueled speculation. A Kikuyu-Kalenjin alliance makes sense for two reasons: it would expand support for Kenyatta and undercut Odinga, who relies heavily on Kalenjin support. We believe that tactical cooperation between Kenyatta and Ruto will continue where they have mutual interests, but that a formal alliance is unlikely, at least in the short-term. Poloff's recent visit to Rift Valley (seftel) leads us to believe that a Kikuyu-Kalenjin alliance would not yet be acceptable to the Kalenjin at the grassroots level, who still feel aggrieved by unaddressed land issues and perceived Kikuyu condescension toward them. Also, Ruto has his own presidential ambitions and would be unlikely to enter into an alliance to play second fiddle to Kenyatta. The Kikuyu, too, would be skeptical of any alliance with Ruto, who is widely believed to have organized and financed attacks on Kikuyu in Rift Valley in the post-election violence.

COMMENT

17. (U) For decades Central Province and the GEMA communities have supplied nearly monolithic support for the political establishment controlled by President Kibaki and his circle. However, dissatisfaction with the current political and economic malaise has opened up Central Province to increasing political competition. If either Karua or Kenneth succeed in attracting significant support away from the political establishment, GEMA voters may be forced to make political choices based on the direction of the country and implementation of the reform agenda rather than ethnic considerations. The GEMA political establishment is aware of the dangers of splitting the GEMA vote, as happened in 1992 when Kibaki and Kenneth Katiba split Central Province, allowing Daniel Moi to be re-elected, and will fight hard to marginalize these challenges. We will continue to follow developments closely.

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